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ABSTRACT

In response to a perceived need to increase the number of students completing associate degree programs and enhance the offering of associate degree programs, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education developed a policy on associate degree programs offered at public institutions. Specifically, the policy is designed to clarify degree designations and content, facilitate transfer credit so that as many students as possible will have the opportunity to continue their postsecondary education, and sharpen institutional missions. The policy divides associate degrees into the following four categories, each with a clear and unique objective: (1) Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees, designed to transfer to a broad range of arts and science baccalaureate programs; (2) Associate of Science in a designated major, designed for transfer to specific, related baccalaureate programs and employment; (3) Associate in Applied Science in a designated major, designed primarily for employment; and (4) Associate of General Studies, designed primarily for transfer for the relatively small number of students who cannot pursue one of the standard degrees. With respect to implementing the policy, two-year institutions offering the associate degrees are responsible for initiating discussion of transfer arrangements with other institutions, while four-year institutions are responsible for communicating any requirements in curriculum design to two-year institutions. (MAB)

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ED 396 794

COMMISSION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
Friday, June 14, 1996

DECISION ITEM A: **State Policy on Associate Degree Programs Offered at Public Institutions**

Staff Recommendation That the Commission for Higher Education approve the *State Policy on Associate Degree Programs Offered at Public Institutions*, June 5, 1996.

Background As part of the Commission for Higher Education's study of two-year instructional opportunities, the Commission has periodically discussed working papers on a variety of topics over the past year:

- Transfer of general education credit from Ivy Tech to four-year institutions;
- Ivy Tech program transfer agreements with universities,
- Methods by which secondary students can earn postsecondary credit;
- Educational attainment of Indiana's population,
- Degree production of Indiana institutions;
- Mobility of postsecondary graduates; and
- Structure of Two-Year Degrees.

Based in part on discussions that have taken place as a result of the working papers just cited, a policy on associate degree programs offered at public institutions has been developed. The intent of the policy is to clarify degree designations and discussion about degree content, facilitate transfer of credit so that as many students as possible will have the opportunity to continue their postsecondary education, and sharpen institutional missions.

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Because much of the policy content is new at the state-level, caution must be applied in interpreting past practice in light of the new policy. As a case in point, the policy indicates that Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) degrees "are not primarily intended to provide the student with a strong foundation for continuing their postsecondary education at the baccalaureate level." While the policy implies, correctly, that in the past many A.A.S. degrees did not (and still don't) transfer significant numbers of credit hours to baccalaureate degrees at public institutions, this was not true in all cases. For example, until quite recently, Purdue University used the A.A.S. designation widely, and most or all of the credits earned in the Purdue A.A.S. could apply to baccalaureate programs.

An early version of this policy was first circulated to the institutions on March 21, 1996. The policy has gone through numerous modifications since that time, including a May 2 draft, which was discussed at the Commission meeting held on May 10, 1996.

Supporting Document

State Policy on Associate Degree Programs Offered at Public Institutions, June 5, 1996

STATE POLICY ON ASSOCIATE DEGREE PROGRAMS OFFERED AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

June 5, 1996

Preamble

This policy is being developed in response to a perceived need to increase the number of students who complete associate degree programs, to articulate better the strengths of associate degree graduates to the business community, and to enhance the offering of associate degree programs by two-year institutions, regional campuses, and campuses serving a regional function.

The intent of this policy is to (1) clarify statewide usage of degree designations for associate degrees, (2) elucidate discussion about associate degree curricular content, (3) communicate effectively to students about associate degree offerings by public institutions, (4) facilitate transfer of associate degree credit so that as many students as possible will have the opportunity to continue their postsecondary education, (5) avoid needless duplication of state resources, and (6) sharpen institutional missions.

A primary objective of the policy is to clearly separate associate degrees into three categories, each with a clear and different objective: Associate of Arts and Associate of Science (transfer to a broad range of arts and science baccalaureate programs); Associate of Science in a designated major (transfer to specific, related baccalaureate programs and employment); Associate of Applied Science in a designated major (primarily employment). For the relatively small number of students who, because of unique circumstances, can't pursue one of these standard degrees, a fourth type of associate degree, the Associate of General Studies, is also described.

Policy

1. Associate of Arts and Associate of Science. **Associate degree programs that are expressly designed to provide the first two years of baccalaureate degree programs in the traditional academic arts and science disciplines and/or to meet the general education requirements of a baccalaureate degree, and that make no claim to prepare students for employment, should:**

   a) **Carry the degree designation of "Associate of Arts" (A.A.) or "Associate of Science" (A.S.);**

   [The Commission's intent is for these programs to be transferable to a broad range of baccalaureate degree programs in the arts and sciences. In the Commission's view, designating a specific program major for these associate degrees may limit the range of arts and science disciplines into which credits will fully transfer and may mislead some students to believe these programs have been designed to prepare them for employment.]

   b) **Be offered by Indiana's public four-year institutions and Vincennes University and primarily serve the needs of students in a particular geographic area through a regional campus or a campus serving regional needs; and**

   c) **Transfer almost all credit hours (typically, 60-66 semester hours) into identifiable baccalaureate degree programs in the arts and sciences at every Indiana four-year, public institution. The typical student could complete a baccalaureate program in one of these disciplines with two additional years of full-time study beyond the associate degree, provided the student knows the baccalaureate discipline they want to pursue at the time they begin their associate degree studies. Students who do not know, at the outset, what baccalaureate program they eventually want to pursue may take longer than two additional years of full-time study to complete their baccalaureate degree because of the sequencing of required courses; and**

   [This policy applies not only to campuses within the same system, but also to transfers between institutions. Thus, for example, the student who begins his or her A.A. or A.S. study at Indiana University, with the intention of pursuing a baccalaureate degree in a specific arts and science discipline at Purdue University, should be able to complete their baccalaureate degree in that discipline with two additional years of full-time study at Purdue.]

   d) **Relate to at least one baccalaureate degree program that represents a genuine and likely opportunity for students to enroll in, due to the geographic location of the baccalaureate program(s) or other factors.**

2. Associate of Science [in a Designated Major]. Associate degree programs that have dual objectives -- to provide students who complete the program with skills that qualify the graduate for employment in a field related to the student's major and to provide the student with a strong foundation for continuing their postsecondary education at the baccalaureate level -- should:

   a) Carry the designation "Associate of Science" (A.S.) with a specific program major designation (e.g. Nursing, Electrical Engineering Technology, Business Administration, Chemistry);

   b) Be offered by all Indiana public four-year and two-year campuses;

   c) Transfer almost all credit hours (which typically total 60-66 semester hours) to a baccalaureate degree program at any campus within the same institution or in the case of public, two-year institutions, to a baccalaureate degree at an Indiana four-year, public institution;

   d) Have the transfer credits count toward a baccalaureate degree in a field closely related to the associate degree major; and

   e) Relate to at least one baccalaureate degree program that represents a genuine and likely opportunity for students to enroll in, due to the geographic location of the baccalaureate program(s) or other factors.

3. Associate of Applied Science [in a Designated Major]. Associate degrees that primarily address a clearly defined, specific, local employment market and are not primarily intended to provide the student with a strong foundation for continuing their postsecondary education at the baccalaureate level should:

   a) Carry the degree designation "Associate of Applied Science" (A.A.S.) with a specific program major designation (e.g. Automotive Technology, Industrial Technology);

   b) Be offered only by Ivy Tech State College and Vincennes University; and

   [The Commission fully recognizes that, in rare instances, a four-year institution's unique mission might lead to the offering of an A.A.S. degree that builds upon the institutional resources in place to fulfill that unique mission. In such cases, it may be appropriate to make an exception to this policy.]

   c) Transfer the general education courses that are part of statewide understandings regarding transfer of general education credits to four-year institutions and, in a few special instances, transfer a significant amount of

technical credits to one or more baccalaureate programs in appropriate majors (e.g. general studies, education, supervision) that have been expressly designed for A.A.S. graduates or whose structures can accommodate the needs of A.A.S. graduates.

4. Associate of General Studies. The Associate of General Studies (A.G.S.) degree (a) is intended for students who cannot readily pursue an A.A., A.S., or A.A.S. degree, (b) is primarily designed to allow students to pursue personal goals with maximum curricular flexibility -- including, in some cases, the recognition of life experience through portfolio review or equivalent evaluation, (c) makes no claim to prepare students for employment, and (d) transfers almost all credit hours (typically, 60-66 semester hours) into a Bachelor of General Studies or equivalent degree. (The A.G.S. degree is offered only by Indiana University, although Ball State University and Indiana State University offer the A.A. in General Studies, and Vincennes University offers the A.A.S. and A.S. in General Studies.)

[Given the Commission's high expectations regarding availability of and access to the Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees, the Commission will review use of the A.G.S. degree in the year 2000, when the policy is fully implemented.]

Implementation of the Policy

5. Implementation of this policy rests equally with both the four-year and two-year sectors of Indiana's system of public postsecondary education; more specifically:

   a) Responsibility for initiating discussion of transfer arrangements under this policy rests with the institution offering the associate degree, which must design its courses and curricula to be compatible with and acceptable to the institution offering the baccalaureate degree if associate degree courses are to transfer;

   b) Four-year institutions have an obligation and a responsibility to work with the two-year institutions and to communicate clearly, completely, and in a timely manner how the courses comprising the associate degree curriculum need to be designed if credit for them is to transfer; and

   c) Those institutions offering associate degrees have a responsibility to inform students of what credits will transfer and how those credits will apply

toward meeting the curricular requirements of appropriately related baccalaureate degrees; and

d) Institutions seeking approval to offer new A.A. or A.S. degree programs must have all required transfer credit arrangements finalized before the Commission will consider their proposals.

6. With respect to Associate of Applied Science degree programs,

   a) All four-year institutions are encouraged to develop, or market more widely if they currently exist, one or more baccalaureate programs in appropriate majors (e.g. general studies, education, supervision) that have been expressly designed for A.A.S. graduates or whose structures can accommodate the needs of A.A.S. graduates; and

   b) Two-year institutions should present and market -- where appropriate and to the greatest extent possible -- evidence of third party program accreditation and/or certification of graduates as a way to communicate program quality to prospective employers.

7. The state should establish the goal of fully implementing this policy by July 2000. Toward this end, all institutions should identify, by December 1996, which of their two-year programs fit into the categories of associate degrees described in the policy.

8. The Commission for Higher Education should annually monitor progress toward fully implementing this policy.

9. The Commission for Higher Education may authorize exceptions to this policy for a compelling set of reasons and circumstances.